
Process Evaluation Summary Report

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Introduction

The vision for Thrive began in 2013, centered around the theory that in order to improve educational outcomes from cradle to career, cross sector partners need to be engaged and working together. The Mayor's Office convened an original core team of 30 leaders (the Leadership Council) to advise the initiative and build a collective impact framework. Participation has since expanded to include representatives from more than 150 organizations, including major city agencies, nonprofits, business, colleges and universities and philanthropy. Today, it is one of the largest collective impact initiatives in the country.

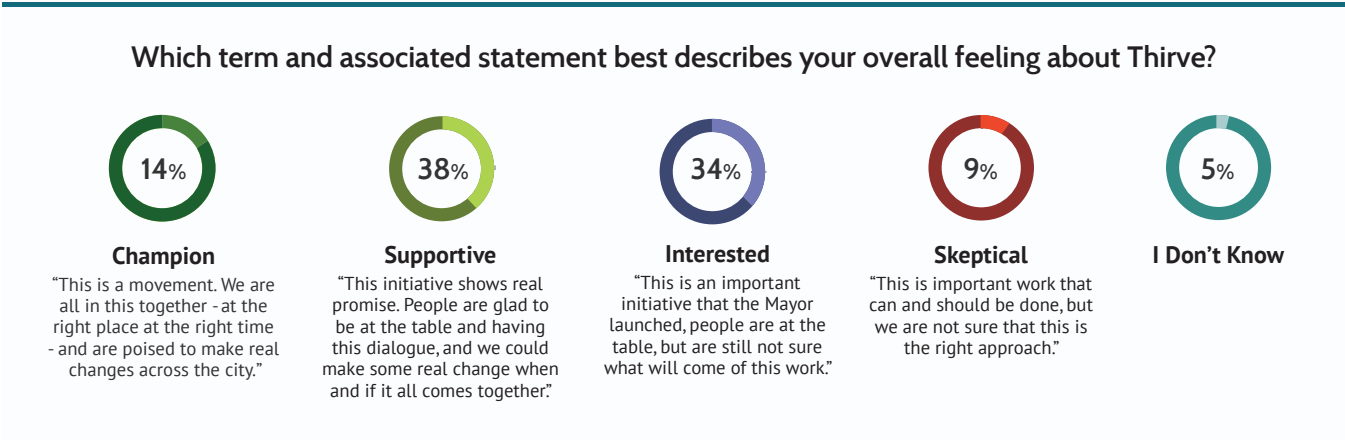
By collaborating, the goal is that service providers and communities work together more effectively and drive better outcomes. Thrive's initial primary goals were:

- Leaders across the city and youth-serving sectors come together to develop a common agenda for youth that includes tangible benchmarks of success from cradle to career.
- Leaders abandon individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improve academic and life outcomes.
- Organizations across sectors focus on this single set of goals and use data to constantly improve their programs and practices and address gaps in services for different communities and age groups.

In the past two years, the initiative has built strong momentum and has achieved some considerable milestones, most notably its progress in organizing a diverse set of stakeholders to commit and work towards a common agenda. Additionally, Thrive has established itself as an independent organization, released an initial baseline report, launched a data pilot and established the Change Network structure to convene organizations, and plan and align actions of a broad group of stakeholders. All of these accomplishments have taken significant coordination and demonstrated incremental progress.

Now, Thrive is at a critical juncture. Internally, new staff members have been added to the team and there is now more bandwidth to support the work of the Change Networks. Externally, 85% of stakeholders remain committed to the work, but noted some pressing challenges that need be addressed in order to for Thrive to reach its full potential.

FSG, a leading expert on collective impact, recently stated that the success of such an initiative depends on the relationships and trust among the people and organizations participating.



Source: Thrive Process Evaluation Participant Survey, 85 respondents

“It is ultimately about enabling adaptive, collective problem-solving,” wrote FSG Managing Director Fay Hanleybrown and Director Jennifer Splansky Juster in a recent blog. “As the saying goes, ‘Progress moves at the speed of trust.’ Oversimplifying what collective impact is can lead to the assumption that it is easy to implement and will lead to quickly seen results. It can sometimes take years, or decades, to achieve the large scale change that collective impact efforts seek.”¹

As you’ll see in the pages that follow, those words hold true in both describing and advising the path of Thrive.

1. “Three Misconceptions around Collective Impact”, FSG blog, <http://www.fsg.org/blog/three-misconceptions-around-collective-impact>

Process Evaluation Overview

The goal of this evaluation process is to address a set of research questions about the structure and process of the initiative, searching for early hallmarks of success. It is based on insights from Thrive stakeholders.

Convening Partners	Aligning Actions of Individual Organizations
<i>Areas of Inquiry</i>	<i>Areas of Inquiry</i>
Leadership Council structure, process and engagement	Clarity of roles and responsibilities of conveners, leaders, staff and other actors
Change Network structure, process, level of ownership and defined goals	Degree to which actors are working together toward common goals
Participant engagement, effectiveness, ownership and level of clarity and consistency in describing what Thrive does and aims to achieve	Degree to which strategies are promoting understanding and increasing commitment of all actors to improve education outcomes

This evaluation did not assess the youth outcomes achieved to date via Thrive, but provided a reflection on progress in building the collaborative infrastructure, while also seeking insights for the initiative moving forward.

The evaluation process included a review of Thrive documents, followed by: interviews with three members of Thrive staff and in-depth interviews with nine Leadership Council and Change Network stakeholders. The evaluation team reviewed findings from these initial interviews and designed an interview guide, conducting an additional 34 interviews with Thrive stakeholders, including representation from the Leadership Council and Change Network. In order to reach a broad set of Thrive stakeholders and be as inclusive as possible, the evaluation team also designed an online survey, which was sent to more than 300 participants. 85 individuals completed the survey, for a 28% response rate. The Thrive stakeholders engaged in the process included members of the Leadership Council, leadership and participants in the Change Networks as well as representatives from the data pilot.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS EVALUATION

This evaluation included perspective from more than 125 Thrive participants, but may not have included the perspectives of participants that are no longer active in Thrive. As part of the planning, the evaluation team worked closely with the Thrive team to identify stakeholder champions as well as skeptics, seeking a balance of opinions and perspectives. The evaluation team invited participants to be candid, in an effort to capture clear, accurate and honest feedback.

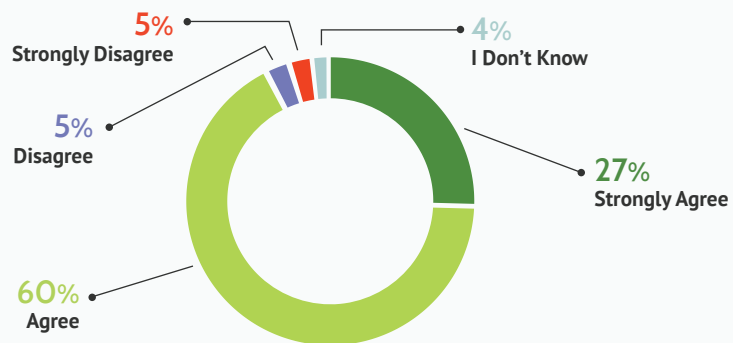
Key Findings

In order to identify areas of strength and best practices while also identifying some of the challenges and opportunities for improvement, Thrive engaged an evaluation team to design and conduct a process evaluation. The evaluation was focused specifically around a core set of research questions that were organized into two main categories: convening partners and aligning actions. The key findings focused on the following areas:

Vision

Nearly all stakeholders felt comfortable articulating the over-arching mission for Thrive. There was also general sense of clarity around Thrive's purpose and big goals, as a collective impact initiative, supporting positive cradle to career outcomes for youth in the city.

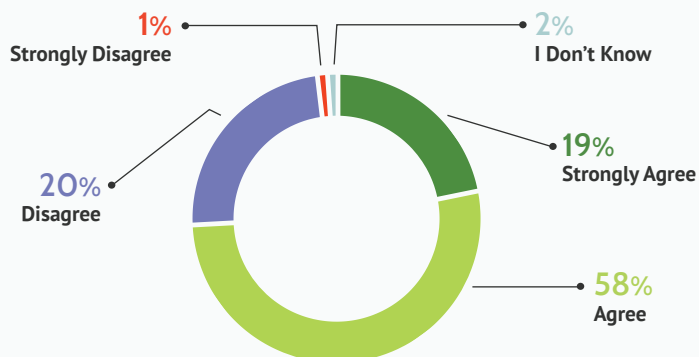
I know or have access to information that provides a clear statement of Thrive's goals



Source: Thrive Process Evaluation Participant Survey, 85 respondents

However, many participants need additional support and guidance from Thrive to understand how all the components fit together and position Thrive to achieve the overall outcomes the initiative. Many reported that they generally know that is happening in each of the Change Networks, but fewer stakeholders had a clear command of the specific initiatives that each Change Network was planning or implementing.

I know or have access to information that describes what is generally happening in each Change Network



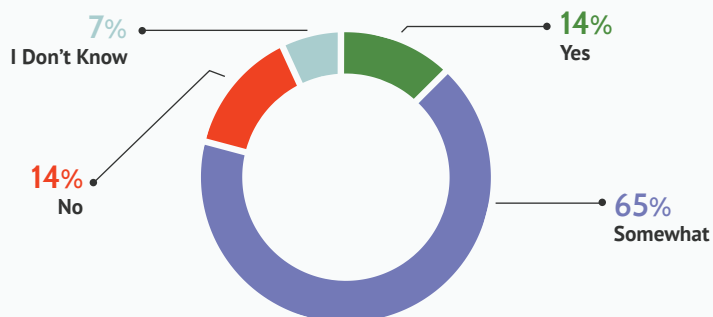
Source: Thrive Process Evaluation Participant Survey, 85 respondents

Stakeholders noted that it would be helpful to have more information about how the work of the Change Networks is aligned with and is designed to advance priority outcomes of the overall initiative. Stakeholders noted that greater clarity about this connection will help advance the work.

Expectations

Most stakeholders came to the table with an interest in working more closely with other organizations to advance key outcomes. To date, stakeholders have valued the platform that Thrive provides, especially the relationships and networking. Respondents noted that some of their initial expectations have yet to be met, including access to data and access to new resources and funding.

Has your participation in Thrive met these expectations?



Source: Thrive Process Evaluation Participant Survey, 85 respondents

In many cases, stakeholders acknowledged that the work to build infrastructure and process takes time and “so the benefits take a while to be realized.” Some Thrive participants noted that Thrive “has moved more slowly than most partners expected” but provided an important caveat: “however, I also think that means that we are building a strong foundation for a set of strategies that will have lasting impact.” Many participants remain optimistic, but note that there is some fatigue among participants expecting to see more rapid progress. Going forward, it will be important to provide clear communication about the progress and accomplishments of the Change Networks and especially progress and opportunities related to funding and data.

Structure and Process

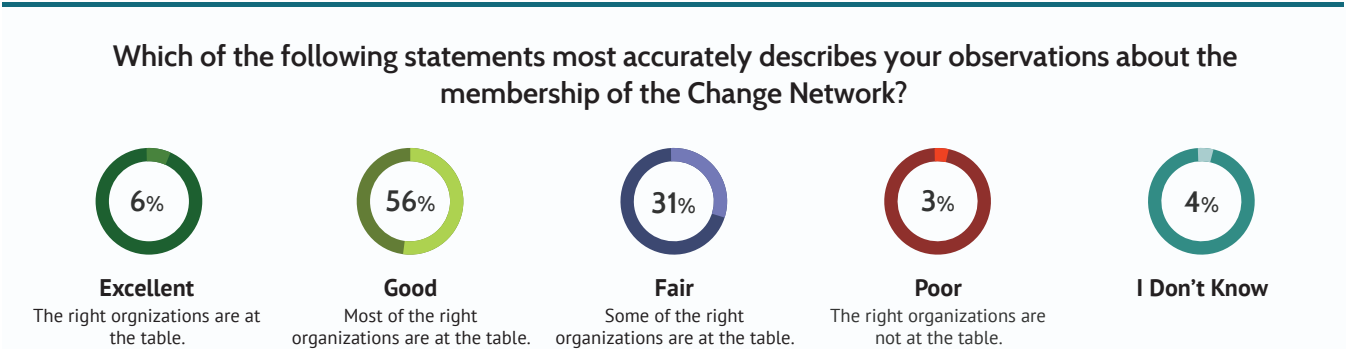
Considering the size and complexity of Thrive, there have been many significant infrastructure accomplishments that are now in place to support the initiative. Stakeholders noted the following most frequently: moving out of the Mayor’s office, establishing an independent organization and hiring staff to facilitate the process and support the work of the Change Networks. These advances have positioned Thrive to move forward faster and create cohesion.

Stakeholders requested clarity related to the role of the Leadership Council, the relationship between the Leadership Council and Change Networks and the roles of key actors in the Change Networks.

Across every aspect of Thrive, respondents stated that communication needs to be strengthened and improved. Specifically, communication channels between the Leadership Council and the Change Networks and across Change Networks need to be formalized and expanded. In addition, there is an opportunity to continue to define and formalize the criteria that the Change Networks use to determine the activities and initiatives that they will pursue and a clear process and roles for the Change Networks and Leadership Council in reviewing, affirming and advancing the work of the Change Networks.

Engagement

Across the Initiative there is high level of commitment and a true dedication to this work. In addition, stakeholders noted that participation in the Change Networks largely includes the right organizations.



Source: Thrive Process Evaluation, Participant Survey, Change Network Participants, 68 responses

Engagement at the Leadership Council level is varied, but many provided concrete recommendations to increase involvement, such as a stronger connection between the collective vision and Change Networks, more defined structure for participation and continuous communication.

There has been high engagement across most of the Change Networks and nearly every participant is committed to the vision of Thrive. Several participants cited the need for more consistent attendance from Change Network members as an opportunity for improvement. Given the critical timing for the initiative, Thrive needs to focus on strengthening the level of engagement (e.g. attendance, participation) across stakeholders. Because involvement and ownership are closely tied with the other key elements, such as communication, role clarity and resources, it is likely that when these areas are strengthened, engagement will also increase.

Resources

Funding remains an important topic for Thrive to address and to design clear communications and parameters around funding opportunities. Stakeholders continue to invest significant time to advance the work of this Initiative. However, this is above and beyond their full time job. Given the cross section of stakeholders involved, including funders and influential policy leaders, many hope that Thrive can be a conduit to additional funding to support and expand this work.

Conclusion

As Paul Schmitz, former CEO of Public Allies and Senior Advisor, Collective Impact Forum, recently observed, the field of collective impact is relatively new and changing rapidly. According to early research, collective impact has emphasized the “structural, strategic and measureable” aspects of the work, but emerging commentary and literature are pointing to the critical role that culture play in this work.² Culture, as they describe it, is created through a shared sense of purpose and values, expectations and goals.

Over the last 18 months, Thrive has impressed its stakeholders with its goals, networking capabilities and development of infrastructure. Now, stakeholders are ready for action. They're ready for communication. They're looking for clarity on funding, leadership and the future of the initiative.

In order to advance the mission even further, Thrive should pursue the following action steps:

- Develop a strategic communications plan that provides participants in Thrive (internal audiences) and external audiences with clarity on the critical topics noted in this report, including but not limited to vision, intended outcomes, initiatives, roles of key actors and accomplishments to date and how all of the work of Thrive fits together.
- Clarify the role and purpose as well as the relationship between the key Thrive structures, including the Leadership Council, the Board of Directors and the Change Networks.
- Outline the short-term and longer-term key action steps, including identifying and securing resources to advance the work of Thrive

Thrive is at a pivotal moment. It has a solid foundation from which to build and now is the time to move forward with the work of aligning actions and convening partners. More than 150 organizations are poised and ready for Thrive to impact the city and beyond.

2. Collective Impact Forum http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-schmitz/the-culture-of-collective_b_6025536.html